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Linking conflict and development: a challenge for the MDG process

Background Document
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> *A peaceful and stable environment in every country is a fundamental condition for the attainment of sustainable food security.*
> World Food Summit Plan of Action, 1996

I.   Introduction

1.   Success in reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will depend on national governments incorporating the Goals in their development strategies, plans and programmes, on the necessary resources being mobilized domestically and from external assistance, but also on overall peace and stability.

2.   Armed conflict affects both individual livelihoods and the economy as a whole. It generates food insecurity and affects the delivery of social services. It increases poverty and hunger; takes children out of school; adds to women's responsibilities and workload; increases child and maternal mortality; contributes to the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases and affects preventive and curative measures; affects the environment and limits access to safe water and sanitation and pushes displaced people into overcrowded and unhealthy shelters; undermines governance, draws on national resources and increases national debt, thus compromising efforts to achieve any of the eight MDGs.

3.   The prevention and resolution of violent conflict is therefore a pre-condition to achieving MDGs and in particular, given FAO's mandate, MDG1 *Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger* and MDG7 *Ensure environmental sustainability*. This matter was already raised at the 1996 World Food Summit and features in two of the seven commitments of its Rome Declaration. At the 55th session of the UN General Assembly in 2001, the Secretary General urged the governing bodies of the specialised agencies *"to consider how they could best integrate a conflict prevention perspective into their different mandated activities"*[1].

4.   Armed conflict is a major problem for development, but also reflects a failure of development. The present paper will present the linkages between conflicts and development, with particular attention to food security, and summarize the work of FAO to date in conflict mitigation and prevention, with a view to elicit guidance of future action and possible partnerships with interested institutions.

II.   The consequences of armed conflict

5.   The existence of armed conflict can dramatically slow a country's development process, especially in low-income countries. It combines local and national impact, affecting agricultural production as well as the social, economic and physical infrastructure. It

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[1] Prevention of Armed Conflict. Report of the Secretary General on the Work of the Organisation, Agenda Item 10, Report A/55/985/ - S/2001/574

generates insecurity and high scale migration. Food becomes a scarce resource and is often used as a strategic weapon by conflicting parties, leading to starvation of civilians.

6.   Full-blown conflicts usually emerge after several months or years of pre-conflict, where the increasing instability and the deterioration of political, economic and social conditions have already severely affected the food and nutrition situation of the population. Food stores are looted or burnt down, livestock is slaughtered, equipment is destroyed and access to land and other natural resources becomes impossible due to the poor security conditions or to the presence of anti-personnel mines. Market linkages and trade opportunities are disrupted, limiting both income-generation and supply of basic commodities, including food. Job opportunities and flow of remittances are severely restricted. Prices increase and assets are sold, pushing people into increased destitution. Studies carried out in several countries in the aftermath of prolonged armed conflict[2] show that average incomes are around 15 percent lower than they would otherwise have been, implying that about 30 percent more people are living in absolute poverty.

7.   Widespread violence, especially over a period of many years, can result in the massive displacement of much of the population. The total number of IDPs in 2004 was estimated to 25 million (of which 6 million in Sudan, 3.4 million in Colombia, 2.3 million in the Democratic Republic of Congo, 2 million in Uganda and 1 million in Iraq)[3]. People are uprooted from their traditional set-up, lose access to their means of livelihood, and in particular to natural resources, are disconnected from their social networks, are not familiar with the new environment they live in and are not necessarily welcome by the host population. Women and children, as well as ethnic and political minorities, are almost invariably the most affected.

8.   Social services and in particular schools and health facilities are disrupted or people stop using them. People live in poor housing and environmental conditions, do not feed well and fall sick. Communicable diseases spread. As a result mortality of vulnerable individuals (in particular children) increases and the resilience of the household is ultimately affected.

9.   Families are separated and people are killed. Conflict, violence and insecurity also generate widespread physical disabilities and psychological traumas, drastically reducing the capacity of affected people to support their households and the capacity of the household to recover. As a consequence both productive and reproductive activities are affected, resulting in lack of food and income, poor child care, poor living conditions, no access to basic health care and education. The combination of poor and/or unsafe dietary intake with disease leads to increased malnutrition Solidarity and traditional kinship networks are either directly affected by the conflict or become incapable of dealing with the magnitude of the problems.

10.   Prolonged violent conflict generates changes in the management of natural resources. These changes can have positive or negative outcomes. Coping strategies can lead to unsustainable exploitation of resources, leading to degradation of forests and rangeland. But complex emergencies can also lead to some degree of adaptation and the emergences of new social and production systems. The recent expansion of cassava production in Africa can, for example, be traced in some areas to the need to maintain food security in highly insecure

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[2] Breaking the conflict trap : civil war and development policy – Paul Collier &al. - World Bank Policy research report 26121 (2003)
[3] Internal Displacement – Global overview of trends and developments in 2004 - The Global IDP Project http://www.idpproject.org-

conditions. Displacement from food insecure areas may actually accelerate the transition towards more sustainable development.

11. The impact of armed conflict is not limited to the conflict area. It diverts resources from national development programmes and weakens government capacity, indirectly affecting the provision of services to the whole population. It usually affects neighbouring countries, due to the influx of refugees and its consequences, the increase of military expenditure and the impact on the regional economy. It contributes to the spread of HIV/AIDS through displacement, rape or commercial sex. Finally, armed conflict creates territory outside the control of any recognized government, which is often used to produce and transport drugs (95 percent of the global production of hard drugs occurs in countries with civil wars and the major supply routes run through conflict territories) or as a base for combatants[4].

12. Neither is the impact limited to the duration of the conflict itself. Economic and social costs of armed conflict, such as high military expenditure, capital flight, heightened mortality and morbidity rates, or consequences of disability at household, community and national levels persist for years. Economic policy, democratic institutions, or political freedom are usually affected.

III. <u>Understanding causes of conflict</u>

13. Violent conflict often emerges in the least developed areas in the world (such as mountain areas), which are geographically remote, economically marginal, politically powerless, culturally isolated and socially excluded from the national and regional development process. It is becoming increasingly concentrated in relatively few developing countries. More than a billion people live in low-income countries that are not able to sustain the policies, governance, and institutions needed for achieving growth and diversifying out of dependence on primary commodities. Risks of armed conflict in these countries have been rising as economies have deteriorated.

14. Because of their relative inaccessibility, conflict areas are often home to ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples which have been marginalised from mainstream development -- among the most impoverished on earth. Ethnic differences *per se* do not trigger conflict or violence.[5] Disputes often fall along ethnic and religious divisions, but they are much more likely to turn violent in countries with low and declining incomes and poor governance.

15. Impoverished people often face increased competition for scarce natural resources, social inequality and political marginalization. The poorer people are, the more desperate they become and the less they have to lose. Involvement in armed conflict may even become a means of livelihoods security for them and their families.

16. Many conflicts are linked to competition for land and other natural resources Degradation or depletion of natural resources, unequal distribution and population pressure can trigger competition for scarce resources, in particular arable land and water. Tensions

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[4] - ibid. -

[5] Indeed, societies that are highly diverse mixtures of many ethnic and religious groups are usually safer than more homogenous societies.

induced by unfair and insecure access to land and other natural resources are often fuelling civil conflicts.

17.   The access of poor people to the natural resources which are essential to their survival can be further limited by conservation policies or the allocation of concessions to outside private companies. Poorly planned economic development can indeed lead to violent conflict as valued resources – forests, minerals and water – are exploited by 'outsiders', with local people reaping little benefit or compensation. Their precarious livelihoods can even deteriorate further when dams or mines destroy their homes and lifestyles or poison their fields, and appropriate compensatory measures have not been taken. Sectoral or narrowly targeted aid projects, programmes or policies can also affect often complex interactions between population groups. Deepened poverty, migration, sharpened social cleavages and weakened institutions, depleted environments and resulting food insecurity become fertile ground for armed conflict.

18.   Given their isolation and lack of livelihood opportunities, such remote areas may be particularly appropriate for the production of illegal crops. For local farmers, such crops are a means to survive. When governments and international organizations try to suppress their cultivation without providing alternative livelihood opportunities, conflict inevitably arises.

19.   Increased tensions over land access can also result from the influx of migrants and displaced people in new settlement areas. Out-migration from food insecure and/or conflict areas in search of better livelihood options can thus in turn give rise to conflict for land and other resources in the areas of immigration.

20.   Access to water is a major source of conflict between and within countries and will become an increasing problem in the years to come, in particular in arid and semi-arid areas. Competition for water both upstream and downstream can – and does – escalate into conflict. Most of the large rivers of the world flow through the territory of two or more countries. In 1995, disputes over water triggered 14 international conflicts.

21.   Border areas are therefore particularly at risk of conflict, since unrest and instability in one country can spill into another and since they are a logical battlefield for trans-boundary disputes. In such cases, the local population become helpless hosts or are eventually brought into the conflict.

22.   The phenomenon is therefore complex. Unless all those factors and impacts are properly understood and logically linked into a local-specific livelihood analysis, development policies programmes and projects will be unable to prevent violent conflict and may even inadvertently aggravate the underlying problems.

IV.   FAO's Role in Conflict Resolution and Mitigation

A.   Preventing conflict and promoting peace

There is near-universal agreement that prevention is preferable to cure, and that strategies of prevention must address the root causes of conflicts, not simply their violent symptoms.

Source: We the Peoples—the Role of the United Nations in the 21st Century (widely known as the Millennium Report)

23.   A number of FAO activities are implicitly or explicitly associated with conflict prevention. Clarification of land tenure arrangements and measures which lead to an enhanced role for communities in the management of natural resources, agreements on the sharing of international water resources and fishing rights, all contribute to reduced tensions between and within countries.

24.   Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (SARD) depends upon, but also plays an important role, in the promotion of a peaceful and stable environment, where opportunities are created for more equal access to physical, natural, financial and institutional resources for sustainable livelihoods. Livelihood diversification through off-farm income will be particularly important to relieve disparities and tensions. The SARD initiative, facilitated by FAO but led by civil society, which promotes sustainable agriculture for poverty reduction and environmental protection, should therefore play a key role in preventing armed conflict.

25.   FAO also hosts - and is a member of - the Secretariat of the Mountain Partnership, an international alliance of UN organizations, IGOs and major groups. Evidence has shown that mountain communities are among the world's poorest and hungriest. In recognition of the high prevalence of conflict in mountain areas[6] and its adverse effect on mountain people and mountain environments, FAO selected as the UN International Mountain Day 2004 theme: *'Peace: key to sustainable mountain development'* and coordinated worldwide observance of this day.

26.   Sustainable and long-term prevention of armed conflict is also closely connected to strengthening the respect for human rights. It has repeatedly been pointed out how hunger and poverty manifested by too many people without perceived opportunity or hope in their lives, can contribute to social unrest and conflict. Pursuance of the right to food can thus be justified as a means for conflict prevention. FAO Members have recently approved Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realisation of the Right to Adequate Food in the context of National Food Security[7]. This human-rights-based tool will assist them in developing appropriate strategies, policies, programmes and activities.

27.   FAO works at different levels to address conflict issues: At regional level it has assisted Regional Economic Organisations in the development of food security strategies,

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[6] As many as 245 million rural mountain people in developing and transition countries may be at risk of, or actually experiencing, hunger. FAO, *'Towards a GIS-based analysis of mountain environments and populations'*.

[7] http://www.fao.org/righttofood/common/ecg/51596_en_VGS_eng_web.pdf

which include, where appropriate, specific proposals for conflict prevention and resolution; at national level, it assists governments to define and implement innovative policy and legislative frameworks regarding land access and use; and at local level, FAO has developed a comprehensive training package aimed at supporting diverse natural resource user groups to manage conflicts that inevitably arise in the protection use and control of natural resources. These different initiatives and instruments are geared to ultimately prevent violent conflict .

28.   FAO believes that a better integration and articulation of these different tools and approaches, in close collaboration with other agencies, would allow FAO to increase its contribution to peace and prevention of violent conflict. Such a strategy should include the following components:

- *focus development efforts on low-income countries*. This is in line with FAO's policy of giving priority assistance to Low Income Food Deficit Countries (LIFDCs). Specific attention will be given to facilitating the development of prevention *and* preparedness strategies based on a right to food approach in *at-risk* (in particular resource-poor and food insecure) *areas* as well as *border areas* (within a regional approach). Such strategies will be based on an understanding of the key livelihood systems (constraints, opportunities, coping strategies) and their interaction as well as the interests and concerns of key local stakeholders (including social, economical and political groups). Priority will be given to capacity-building of local institutions in order to protect and provide support services to resource-poor households and to facilitate conflict resolution. Local strategies for protecting and promoting food security, nutrition and livelihoods (ensuring appropriate, equitable and sustainable use of natural resources, strengthening the resilience of vulnerable households and building up capacity of local institutions) can provide the necessary integrating framework. FAO believes that such strategies would be central to the operationalisation of the MDG process.

- *facilitate concerted action and support by national and international institutions*. Advocacy for conflict prevention and resolution will be mainstreamed into advocacy for achieving MDGs - and in particular enhancing food security and reducing hunger - and will target government, international organizations (and in particular UN agencies), bilateral partners and NGOs. FAO's training course on Protecting and Promoting Nutrition in Crisis and Rehabilitation will contribute to articulating the different dimensions of livelihoods support required for achieving the MDGs.

- *mainstream livelihood considerations* – with specific attention to preventing violent conflict - *into the development and implementation of development policies and programmes*. Particular attention should be given to minimizing rivalry for aid resources and benefits, fostering cooperation among rival communities or groups, and monitoring the impact of policies, programmes and projects on the various stakeholders and on their interaction.

B.   Mitigating the impact of conflict and rebuilding peace

29.   In the aftermath of natural disasters and conflicts, FAO helps rural people not only to survive, but also to rebuild their lives, with the objective of protecting and enhancing the

livelihoods of affected households and supporting the transition to peace. Unless the causes of conflict, relations and divisions between livelihood groups, and agendas and strengths of key stakeholders are understood, assistance to victims of conflict, and in particular food and agriculture relief operations, will overly focus on short-term, life-saving objectives and will not be able to differentiate among population groups who have been affected differently and provide appropriate support. Aid (in both pre- and post-conflict situations) may even unwittingly exacerbate conflict by widening disparities, influencing the behaviour and resources of conflict parties.

30.   Even when such assistance is effective in meeting its stated objectives (such as when humanitarian assistance saves lives through the provision of emergency food or medicine or when development assistance contributes to people's abilities to sustain independent economic production), it often inadvertently contributes to the tensions that prompt conflict and risk exacerbating, reinforcing and feeding conflict. In most cases positive and negative impacts coexist, and it is therefore important to review and design interventions with a view to avoid negative impacts and maximize positive impacts on conflict. It is also useful to view all the interventions that significantly affect risk in an integrated way: different interventions are most effective at different phases, and so may best be sequenced. This requires the involvement of, and collaboration between, actors who are not used to working together (including peacekeeping forces).

31.   Vulnerable livelihood assessment (involving local institutions, resource people and community members) is particularly important to understand people's constraints and coping strategies. Priority will be given to strengthening resilience of at-risk households and livelihood groups and to focus on interventions likely to unit people across divides. Inter-institutional collaboration between humanitarian and development actors, and between government and NGOs/CSOs will be a major step towards to good governance.

32.   Providing secure access to land and natural resources for temporary or permanent use for shelter and for agricultural purposes is key to limiting the risk of additional or future conflicts. People returning to their home areas often find that others have competing claims to natural resources, and these disputes must be resolved fairly and transparently. People who are unable to return to their homes must be resettled elsewhere in a manner that does not threaten the rights of the communities in which they are settled. Addressing these issues of access to land is thus often a sound investment to prevent escalating violent conflicts or to ensure sustainable integration of displaced groups in resettlement zones.

33.   The adoption of human-rights based approaches in post-conflict situation will be conducive to protecting and strengthening livelihoods and ultimately to promoting a culture of peace and prevention of further conflict. The Voluntary Guidelines for the Right to Food provides specific attention to conflict situations: States must not hinder the exercise of (lawful) activities that individuals and groups undertake to produce or procure food and must prevent armed groups or other entities from looting foodstuffs and from depriving civilians of access to food; must not restrict their access to humanitarian consignments and must facilitate the passage of humanitarian consignments and ensure their safety; and must provide support to individuals and groups that are unable to feed themselves, and request the assistance of the international community, if they are unable to fulfil these duties on their own.

34.   FAO recommends that integrated information and monitoring systems be systematically set-up - building-up, linking and broadening existing systems - in conflict-

prone areas to inform decisions and monitor the progress towards achieving the MDGs. Conflict analysis and conflict indicators should be mainstreamed into such systems. M&E systems should be geared to understand the impact of the interventions on both livelihoods on beneficiary groups (food consumption, time for women, access to school, health) and the evolution of the conflict.

35.   Rehabilitation and recovery efforts must be pursued in a timely, coordinated and sustained manner, in order to prevent relapse into conflict. The first decade of post-conflict peace has proved to be key to sustainable conflict reduction. While humanitarian interventions are clearly a priority in an initial phase – and assisting member states in coordinating of emergency relief interventions and capacity building of humanitarian actors a priority -, major investment programmes linked to reviewed government policies and capacity-building of institutions are likely to be successful in the second half of the decade. Present practice however results in a flood of aid in the immediate post-conflict period, when the country is prominent in the international media, which tapers out after two years. Aid in post-conflict situations over this ten-year period should be both larger than it is at present and phased in gradually. This would require changes in donors' practices, including, where relevant, lengthening the period between the political commitment of post-conflict aid and its disbursement. Such an approach should allow governments by the end of the post-conflict decade to sustain the growth needed to make the country safer.

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V.   Conclusion

36.   Peace and prosperity are inextricably linked, and mutually dependent on one another. Peace encourages investments and allows social and economic development Conflict destroys lives, opportunities and environments, and may be one of the most significant obstacles to sustainable development as it can destroy in hours and days what has taken years and decades to develop. Peace is a public good and an essential condition for attaining the MDGs, and must, therefore, be recognised as a core objective of all nations. Together, UN agencies can, and should, play an active role in promoting peace and stability in the world. When social and economic development succeeds, and equity and justice prevail, countries become safer. The MDG process gives nations an opportunity to join forces to that end. Violent conflict can only be prevented, and its incidence, severity and duration reduced, if development efforts, along with rehabilitation and recovery interventions in post-crisis situations, focus on low-income countries and marginalised population groups and if the necessary resources are allocated in a timely way. Reducing the incidence of violent conflict and achieving MDG 1 "Halving poverty and hunger" would therefore by and large require the same approach. It is therefore suggested that conflict indicators be considered for monitoring progress towards achieving MDGs.

37.   FAO is already meeting the challenge in many ways around the world. It assists member countries in addressing the needs of vulnerable people in many geographical and technical areas crucial to peace and stability. But the prevention and resolution of violent conflict calls for a dedicated institutional strategy on the part of FAO at Headquarters, regional and country levels. A concerted effort is needed to make conflict prevention an integral part of development policy and programming in conflict-prone areas. Because conflicts have multiple, inter-related causes they also require inter-related and integrated policies and approaches for their resolution. FAO must therefore mainstream conflict prevention and management into its strategic framework, with a view to achieve synergy and

a better focus of initiatives to date. Since the approach remains the same in the different phases of the emergency cycle - prevention, preparedness, relief, rehabilitation and recovery – its incorporation into FAO's field programme would contribute to further bridge the often artificial gaps between these phases.

38.   But given the global dimensions of conflict, prevention can not be limited to local and national action. National and global policies should be systematically reviewed with a view to mitigate an aggravation of social disparities which would compromise the livelihoods of vulnerable households and increase the risk of conflict. National and international action also needs to be taken to avoid or cushion price shocks, in order to prevent conflict in those countries who already participate in global growth.

39.   The challenges posed by conflict cannot be tackled alone. Rising to these challenges requires working side by side -- with governments, academic institutions, development agencies, bilateral partners, NGOs and civil society, the private sector, and, of course, the communities themselves. And it requires coordinated action on many fronts -- political, social and environmental. Concerted action -- individually and collectively at all levels – is needed to better understand the dynamics of conflict and to find ways to prevent and mitigate it. The promotion of peace and stability will be a major step towards reducing the number of poor, hungry and food-insecure in the world and to protect environments for all.